



**Statement of Ken Fletcher, Legislative Director  
Michigan State AFL-CIO  
Before the House Commerce Committee  
In Opposition to House Bill 5447  
January 17, 2006**

The Michigan State AFL-CIO strongly opposes House Bill 5447.

Workers in this state need an ergonomics standard to prevent crippling repetitive strain injuries – in fact, it's the state's biggest job safety problem. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) estimates that 50% of all worker compensation claims are for strains, sprains and repetitive motion injuries.

These injuries are a tremendous drain on our economy. On a national level, it has been conservatively estimated by OSHA that ergonomic injuries are costing our economy more than \$50 billion annually. Every year employers pay between \$15 billion and \$18 billion in workers' compensation costs alone. Something needs to be done to prevent these injuries in the first place.

Several pro-active businesses have implemented ergonomic programs and have saved money while reducing workplace ergonomic injuries. Lacks Enterprises in Grand Rapids realized a net annual savings of \$900,000 by instituting their ergonomic program. Other Michigan companies such as Sara Lee Inc., MeadWestvaco, Detroit Diesel Corp, and SC Johnson have all experienced similar results by instituting an ergonomic program.

That's why the administration of Republican Governor John Engler began the process of establishing an Ergonomics Standard Advisory Committee in MIOSHA to see if a state standard could be drafted. This committee has representatives of business and labor. In fact, a majority of the members come from the business community. The committee works by consensus to achieve whatever recommendation they may make. The Ergonomics Standard Advisory Committee has been meeting for a couple of years and is currently on draft #12 of a possible recommendation for a proposed standard. Business concerns are being addressed by the advisory committee as they discuss each new draft.

If the advisory committee does reach a consensus and makes a recommendation for a proposed standard, that recommendation then goes before the General Industry Safety Standards Commission and the Occupational Health Standards Commission. Both of these bodies have equal representation between business and labor and are appointed by the governor with advise and consent of the Senate. Public hearings would be held and, as always, any proposed administrative rule ultimately comes before the legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. The legislature will have a chance to reject any proposed rule if you feel the need to do so.

We ask that you oppose House Bill 5447 and allow the Ergonomic Standards Advisory Committee to complete its work and make a recommendation for a potential ergonomic standard. At that time, people can assess the impact of any proposed standard and can then take whatever position that they feel is necessary.

If Michigan workers are suffering from preventable ergonomic injuries that are costing employers millions in workers' compensation and lost time costs, doesn't it make sense to see if something can be done to prevent these injuries in the first place? Companies like the ones previously mentioned have proven that taking a proactive approach to the prevention of ergonomic injuries just makes sense from an economic perspective. Why would any reasonable company resist exploring options to reduce their costs?

We urge you not to get in the way of the work of the Ergonomic Standards Advisory Committee. Let these experts complete their mission so we can reduce the tremendous human and financial drain that ergonomic injuries are having on our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to oppose House Bill 5447. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.